

## **NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS**

**Moderator: Michele Higgs**  
**May 16, 2006**  
**3 p.m. EDT**

Operator: Good day everyone and welcome to the Neighborhood Networks monthly conference call.

This call is being recorded.

At this time, I'd like to turn the call over to Ms. Michele Higgs. Please go ahead, ma'am.

Michele Higgs: Yes, good afternoon. Thank you, Amy. Hello, everyone and welcome to the Neighborhood Networks May conference call. The topic for today's call is "Who's Who on Your Board? Identifying and Developing a Board for Your Neighborhood Networks Center." Brandon Felton, who is a fellow technical assistance coordinator, developed the content and the speakers for this call and he'll join us today.

Now, we're part of the team of technical assistance coordinators that work with you to address the needs of Neighborhood Networks centers around the country. Now, boards of directors run many Neighborhood Networks centers. Fewer centers, however, understand or make use of their board and the power that they can wield as a group and individuals. With this call, we hope to give you insight into how to build your board of directors, understand their function and get them and keep them involved. The speakers who will join us today offer a wealth of expertise on this issue.

But before I introduce our speakers, let me remind you that the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool, also known as the START business plan, contains resource materials that help you look at the capacity of your center, and provide the foundation upon which you can organize your outreach activities. It will also help you to examine the workings that make up your center's operations, and help you look at your governance structure as well.

If you have questions about the START business plan, resident needs assessments, board development or general questions pertaining to Neighborhood Networks, please call the toll-free Neighborhood Networks information line at (888) 312-2743. You can also visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org). Again, that's toll-free, call (888) 312-2743 or visit the Web site at [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org).

I also want to remind listeners that a verbatim transcript of this call will be made available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site in about two weeks.

Now, let's take a moment to welcome the following centers to the neighborhood. We're all over the map today. We have Hazelcrest Place Computer Center in Michigan, Diego Beekman Mutual Housing Association in New York, and the Pine Villa Apartments in Washington State. Welcome, each of you, to the neighborhood.

Now about today's discussion, strong relationships with stakeholders in the community and a START business plan make a center attractive for potential partners. An involved board of directors can be of help here. One board member may also be a member of other organizations that can provide rich networking opportunities for your center. Board members don't just provide guidance, they can provide resources.

The care and feeding of a board of directors is a special task. Boards can assist centers in many ways, but they need to be engaged, and appreciated for their output – I'm sorry – their input. This

afternoon, we want to help you understand who's who on your board of directors, and help you learn how you can work together for the success of your center. Our speakers today will help you see how boards evolve and function.

And I want you to hear all about that, so I'm going to stop talking and introduce our speakers.

First, we have Mr. Stephen Broyles. Mr. Broyles has more than 16 years of experience working with faith- and community-based organizations and health related nonprofit organizations in numerous managerial and executive positions. He currently serves as a capacity building consultant, and specializes in nonprofits that provide health and human services to minority populations.

Dr. Ronald Stewart is passionately engaged in service to the nonprofit and public sectors. Having served as senior staff or consultant, to both large and small organizations, his services include a wide variety of capacity building intervention, such as executive search, and job orientation, board development, planning, evaluation, and foundation.

And with that, I'd like Dr. Stewart to start.

Ronald Stewart: Well thank you, Michele. That was a very gracious introduction; I appreciate that and welcome everybody to the call. For those of you in the Northeast, I hope it's starting to dry out a little bit, and in the Southeast, maybe the smoke is going away. I'm in Southern California, and it's sunny and hot here. So I'll try to keep my conversation focused to something that is an appetite to everyone and that is involving your boards of directors in trying to get your mission accomplished and your people served.

The first question is, there's three areas I'm going to address. And I'm going to start out each one by kind of giving you a framework for the conversation and giving you some thoughts.

The first area I want to have a little bit of dialogue around is board function and the roles of board members. As you probably know, boards are in place for a good reason. They are there to be a check and balance against staff, to provide oversight over the organization. And to ensure that the organization's financial ability remains solvent, and you remain an independent organization.

In doing so, we go out and try to find interested others who will come and join us in this effort, and become what's known as a board member. In most cases, board members are volunteers, and like working with any other volunteer they have limited time. Their time constraints are sometimes valuable in that, that focuses them to get a meeting done quicker, but in other times, some people over commit themselves. And when I'm out working with organizations and we start to evaluate new members for boards, we often times take a look at how many other boards does this person sit on? Because if I'm out looking for a board member to truly engage them and get them involved, seeing somebody who sits on a number of boards sometimes worries me.

I like to see people who are engaged in their community by no doubt. But if somebody is serving on four or five, six different boards, do they really have the time to dedicate to me, or the organization I'm working with, to be a good board member? So that's one of the first little litmus tests that I try to take a look at.

As we search communities for board members, we should be sure that the folks we are entertaining for these positions reflect our community; not only in all of the demographic factors that we're often time pushed to look at, but also are they folks from different regions. If you're in a rural area, do you have folks from all corners of your community, do you have folks from the urban center? You want to make sure that when someone looks to your organization and evaluates you by the board membership that they say, "wow, that group of people does represent our community." So if you can get folks who have the time to commit, if you can build a body of people that are diverse in who they are, in the skill sets they bring to the board, I think that's a pretty solid place to launch yourself from.

When you have a board in place, who are responsible for providing oversight and governance thoughts to the staff, part of what they need from us, from staff, is helping them understand what their board functions really are. And I get a lot of requests to provide this service to go in and educate staff and boards about what they're supposed to be doing when they get to the boardroom, and I do believe it is a two-part conversation.

I run into staff who will complain that their board doesn't do what they want to them to do. When I start analyzing the situation, I find that the staff really doesn't use the board, doesn't keep them informed, doesn't work to build relationships with individual board members. And then, when we do pull them around the table, maybe running a pretty loosely run meeting. And for a volunteer who may have a very short time commitment for that day that can be a point of frustration.

So I try to make sure that staff are looking at their role on servicing the board, and taking that very seriously. I believe that involves creating an agenda for the meeting, working with the board chair or co-chair, how it's structured in advance of the meeting to establish a true agenda and time it out so that if we say we're going to meet for an hour-and-a-half, we'll meet for an hour-and-a-half. Placing calls to all members in the days before the meeting, reminding them of the meeting.

Again, people are so busy in this day and age, and placing those courtesy calls can sometimes help get that quorum that a lot of people feel they can never meet is getting enough people in the room to have a conversation. So working with them in advance, I think, can save a little bit of heartache in the long run. I enjoy giving boards their agendas prior to the meeting, doing a mailing with all of the stuff, so that if they choose to read it they can do so. But, I also provide another copy in the board meeting room. I don't expect them to cart everything with them. I used to expect that and I was consistently disappointed, so I've kind of given up on that.

Actually, what I do now for most organizations is recommend that they keep board binders in the board meeting room, and that each binder is assigned to a unique individual and that individual, then is able to pull that binder off the shelf when they enter the board meeting room. And that binder is up-to-date with everything that has involved their time on the board, including the current day's activities and agenda.

So I think, again, staff have a huge role in preparing the meeting, and getting ready to have a door open up and people walk in and want to be engaged.

When those souls walk into the meeting, we're hoping that they are coming there with at least two different objectives, I think. The first one is that we look to them to be individual board members. And some of them will have specific roles in the board; some will be president and vice president, treasurer, secretary, there may be ad hoc committees that are created around personnel or planning, and these individuals are going to have to head those up. So we're looking to individuals to bring an individual voice to the board.

As we look at them individually, I can't stress enough getting to know them. It's like any other relationship you probably have in your life, the better you know someone and know what their likes are and their dislikes, and how they operate, and what their pet peeves are, the greater likelihood, we as staff and managers are going to have, in getting them to a place in time we can have a conversation that works for our needs. I encourage staff that I work with, usually the ED's or the chief executive officer, to be sure that they go on a lunch with each board member, not less than twice a year. Just to go out, have a conversation, get to know each other a little bit more, talk about likes and dislikes of what's going on with the organization in the board. A lot of times these conversations can't take place in the boardroom. People are not going to be comfortable to have them in an open environment like that. So, by finding an outside source where you can have those meetings, say over lunch, that sometimes helps individuals express what makes the board work for them, or not work for them.

There are lists of things we ask individuals to bring to the board. It very well may start with a cash contribution, and most funding organizations want to see that a board gives. And, so being able to say my board gives 100 percent is a fabulous thing. And you may have some folks, I'm sure you do, who cannot afford to really give much. But if they contribute \$1 and the person next to them who has a lot of money gives you \$5,000 you can say that both of them, 100 percent, gave to the organization. So, I'd encourage you to think about that.

I would also create a job description for them, much like we do for our employees. Let's have job descriptions about what these board members will do when they're in this role. That job description can cover things like conflicts of interest, it can talk about meeting dates and times, and give a rule about how many meetings you should attend, and if you miss them, what may happen if you do. But it is a serious job, and I do believe it requires a job description.

If you don't have one of those created, they are easily put together. I have samples I could provide to Neighborhood Networks and you could work with it, but it is something, I believe, you should consider.

When they all sit around the table, they begin to think as one mind, we hope. And we hope to be able to lead a conversation and use that body as a whole, acting as a board, to give us sound guidance and advice. Those meetings can sometimes be an absolute joy. Other times, they make you want to pull your hair out, if your experience is anything like mine. And again, having a good chair who understands how a board chair is supposed to act and how to run a meeting, if that person has been skilled well and trained well, they will often times be able to head off problems that may be arising during a conversation. Make sure that people who are maybe being quiet are included in the conversation, so it really becomes meeting management.

If you have a good agenda, if you have board members who understand their roles, you should be able to get through a board meeting in the time that is posted. I'm a big believer in timelines. If we say we're having a two-hour meeting, and it's starting to go well past two o'clock, or the two hour timeframe, then we need to either get the permission of the group to continue or we need to have a second meeting, but people's time is very limited and again, they're volunteers. So please, keep that in mind.

The second area I'd like to chat just briefly about is reinvigorating boards and engaging members. And it goes back to the comment I just made earlier. If we understand these people, then we know what motivates them, what invigorates them. By getting out and introducing yourself and really spending time in getting to know who they are, it will help us keep things alive for them.

What I have found with most boards that are struggling with this is that members are not getting fed what they need from staff, and do not feel that they are supported by staff. Staff may not have job descriptions for them. The organization may not have created those, and if they did not create them there's a darn good chance that probably nobody is paying attention to things like board tenure. And when people have been on the board for a certain amount of time, asking them to either take another role with the organization or to exit the board, bringing new members on is a good thing. It's bad to have everybody leave at once, because then institutional memory goes out there door as well, but it's nice to have new blood coming in. So paying attention to term limits, rotating people in, rotating them off, is a healthy thing. In doing that, it usually helps to keep the board table conversation invigorated because you get new viewpoints. You have people who have been there for a while who can balance new viewpoints, and it really helps to kind of get everybody engaged again.

If somebody is beyond reengagement and they're not able to [offer] support, and they're not stepping away from the board on their own, then I do believe it becomes a time when the board chair and the staff again take that person to lunch, and find a comfortable space to talk. And just

say "gee, how can we find a better opportunity for you to serve this organization, given that it seems like, you know, the board may not be where you want to be now." Sometimes board members wait on us to have that dialogue or to start that dialogue. And if you feel it, then you've got to take it on. Many times, I believe staff feel that this is kind of the white elephant in the room. We can't take these people on. We need to respect them. We respect their roles. Well, that's true, we do do all of that. But, I think it's also respectful of them, if we engage them, and say: how are you doing? And do you need to step away? There's nothing wrong with that if it's done in the right context and the right format.

Lastly, and kind of blending into that conversation, the common area talks about recruitment and adding new board members. When we are out recruiting, as I started off talking in this session about, we need to look at our community and say who on our board is not represented. And then actually go out and attempt to recruit those individuals to the board. As we recruit them, I think it's very fair to be very direct with them on the front end, and show them the job description we just mentioned. And say "look, here are the things that we're going to be expecting of you, or from you, over time. And here is the meeting commitment we're going to need from you. We're going to need you six times a year for two hours in the evening."

If there is going to be a cash contribution that is asked of board members, let them know right on the front end, you know, that every year we expect every board member to get or give \$100 or whatever your limit is. Sometimes you can tone that down, especially with folks who don't have the money to give, by saying, you know, if you can't personally give, would you help us give. Some people may be skilled grantwriters, and would be willing to write a grant and bring in money. Some may go out and ask a friend to give. We just need to make a zone of comfort for them. But, by going to them right in the beginning when their name is being considered for board membership, they then have the opportunity to say, you know, this isn't for me. Or no, this is exactly what I want to do. And if they seem even a bit wishy-washy, we probably should table them and come back to them at another point in time.

But let's assume we get a group of people together that you want. I think then, orientation must happen. I don't think it's fair to set them in on a board meeting, without having a good understanding of your organizations. They should make time to come in, tour your facility, and meet staff. They should get an understanding of how your funding mix works, what your budget is all about, and all of those fundamental things that will allow them and empower them to sit at the board table and make good decisions. Again, that's a staff responsibility to try and pull that training schedule together. We hope that our board chair may assist with that, but again, these volunteer's time are limited things. So we want to be respectful of that.

So, I believe that if you get a diverse crowd at the table, if you orient them well and then if you support them, you should have in the end, a board that functions, board members who feel like they have contributed individually and board members who feel like they walk away from the board table with decisions happening. With that, Michele, I think that is about all I can spew on that topic for the moment.

Michele Higgs: Thank you so much, Dr. Stewart. I think I'm going to depart from the usual and see if we have any questions at this point. Will that be OK with you?

Ronald Stewart: That would be totally fine.

Michele Higgs: Amy, can you check to see if we have anyone on the line right now?

Operator: Yes, ma'am. If you wish to ask a question, please press star, one, on your telephone keypad. If you're using a speakerphone, please make sure your mute function is turned off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. We will take questions in the order that you signal us, and we'll take as many questions as time permits. Once again, that is star, one.

We'll hear first from Brian Franke.

Michele Higgs: Thanks, Brian. Hello.

Female: Hello. Here's my question. I'd like to know if there is some Web site that you could suggest so that – that provides information about the value for services rendered by potential board members who cannot make dollar contributions. You used the example of a grant writer. Is there one place where one could go to get information about the dollar value for various types of services provided to nonprofits?

Ronald Stewart: Very good question, and yes there are. Before I give that, I would like to put one cautionary note out there. If – you know, if I'm serving on a board, and say I'm an attorney. And if I'm serving the board as an attorney, then you can value my time as an attorney. If I am serving as a volunteer, not as an attorney, and whatever that function may be, say grant writer, then you can only value my time as that as a grant writer would earn.

A couple of places to check, the U.S. Department of Labor has labor charts and salary charts organized by state. That should help to give you a good direction. Also, I've been hearing more and more people talk about salary.com as a good clearing house to try and establish salary rates. Also feel free to check locally. I know here in Southern California the Center for Nonprofit Management puts out a salary and wage survey every year. So, if your community puts out something like that, that's going to be a very good local number for you to work with. But, I would say at least those three. If those don't work, Michele will have my e-mail address and track me down, OK?

Michele Higgs: Thank you. Thanks very much for that question. Amy, anybody else?

Operator: There are no further questions at this time.

Michele Higgs: OK. Thank you, Dr. Stewart.

Ronald Stewart: You're most welcome.

Michele Higgs: I'm going to move on now to Stephen Broyles, who will be able to address this topic even further. Mr. Broyles.

Stephen Broyles: All right, good afternoon. Basically, in the time I have, there are three main things I want to focus on, and that's how to maintain a board, and board relationships, which is center. Some local versus national activities, and also, I mention, you know, looking at a governance board, as well as an advisory board and then, finally using the board to increase activities at your Neighborhood Networks centers.

Just to start out, a couple of things. One, I believe in being very practical and I'm going to try and give you some practical steps that you can pretty much implement right away. Dr. Stewart hit on a lot of good points. And really, what he talked about, you know, setting the groundwork for your board of directors, that's the key component in developing a great relationship between the board of directors and your center. Again, having things such as those board job descriptions. Having the commitment from up front, so boards of directors understand what they're getting themselves into. You know, as I've gone across and worked with different boards, I've seen that it's not that the boards didn't want to be engaged. It's not that board members didn't have the drive, or didn't believe in the mission, in many cases, they just weren't sure exactly what they needed to do.

So again, having some clear cut, you know, descriptions and accountability goes a long way. As a general rule of thumb, basically, boards govern and the staff primarily manages. And while in some cases, if you're a small center, or you're starting with a new board, it may be necessary to

have the board more engaged in day-to-day activities. For the most part you want to keep them, you know, in a governance position.

Just some things to keep in mind, I know you have your START plans. And in a sense, one of the key things I'll tell most organizations is having a comprehensive strategic plan that's been in development in conjunction with the board, and you supplement it with regular progress reports. And this can be a useful tool for the board as it develops its own annual work plan and it keeps the board sight focused on the long-term goals and missions of the organization. Also, two, regular reports to the board based on that plan will keep board members apprised of the progress towards organizational goals. And it also provides them part of the basis for evaluation of the organization and the executive director. When they understand clearly how and what they're doing is tied into the overall mission, into the overall strategic plan, then they have a framework to understand, OK, here's what I need to be doing and I'm seeing how it's benefiting and impacting the organization.

Again, Dr. Stewart mentioned it, but I'm just going to co-sign it. Is providing the board relevant materials before the board meeting, and explaining why the materials are coming to the attention of the board. Let them know how specific agenda items relate to the organization's larger mission and what kind of action or discussion is desired of the board on each item. And that goes a long way with board members.

Finally, you know, facilitate the board and board committee discussion so that the board stays focused on the larger issues. Refer to set policies that define the limits of what the board does, and what they cannot do. And strive to engage the board and dialogue among themselves that leads to consensus building. Now there are two situations that generally you're going to come into, you know, dealing with the board.

If it's a board that you have pretty much recruited and developed, it's slightly different than if you come into a situation where the board is currently in place. And the main thing I'll say about that, and it goes back again to what Dr. Stewart was saying, there's developing those one-on-one relationships with your board members. If they are your board members that you've recruited, then you pretty much have an idea of what their gifts are, what their talents are, what their abilities are, and you can put those to use.

If you're being hired, or if the board is all ready in place, then as a director of a Neighborhood Networks center, then basically, what you really have to do is engage these board members, and really take the time to assess what each of the board members bring to the table.

Now, in terms of the local versus the national activities, and the pros and cons of it, a couple of things, because I know some folks have, you know, have some concerns such as well should I have a national board, or if I have – if I'm a part of an organization that has a national board, should I have a local board? And again, it really depends on the functions of your particular center. In some cases, where you have a national board, if the work that you do is national in scope, then it's a pretty good idea. But generally, as a rule of thumb, I would encourage most boards to have local members, and to act locally, particularly in governance. In the case of an advisory board, which is slightly different from a governance board, and the governance board they're basically looking at the organization to make sure that it acts fiscally responsible, that you're following the policies and procedures of the board.

Now an advisory board is a little different. In terms of its membership, they don't have a governance role, one. Two, generally they meet less frequently than a governance board. And three, you're generally using them for that – engaging them for that specific purposes, when they say advisory, it's basically to advise the organization. And this is particularly good in terms of members that you'd like to have on your board. But, because of the time commitment, or because of the constraints of what they have to do, they may not be as available. And these are

folks that you can call on a one-time basis or call every now and then to do things such as, "hey, would you go with me to the foundation meeting? I know you sit on this committee, would you invite them to come and see our center?" Things, basically short-term things such as that where you can engage them, or just a specific question that you may have, that's generally a good idea in terms of engaging an advisory board.

And that kind of leads into where we're going to using the board to increase activities at the Neighborhood Networks centers. One of the big things, you know, I see with a lot of organizations, they'll say well "hey, I've got the board, you know, but how do I get them engaged? How do I get them to really help out at the center?" And it goes back to one, in terms of the recruitment, you know, letting them know in the beginning that that's the expectation. But, if you're in a situation where, you know, you didn't necessarily go through that process, then it goes back to well, now you have to really make sure they understand the mission of the center. Invite them up to come and see, and that's again with that one-on-one work with your board members is absolutely key.

I went to a lot of organizations where if you asked if the board members, "what's the mission of the organization, can you tell me [about] the programs of this organization?" in many instances, the board members couldn't do it. They had a general idea of what they thought the organization was doing. And they had a general idea of what they thought some of the programs of the center, of the organization were, but they really weren't clear. And that goes in part to orientating the board, but, as well as having regular in-service kind of training, where, you know, particularly with new members, that you engage them from soup-to-nuts about your organization. What is it that you do? What is that you value? Who do you serve? And why did you serve? And how do you serve them? And really engage them, because, if you think about it, these board members are the advocates for your organization. They can't advocate what they don't know. So, the big thing is to engage them.

And also, Dr. Stewart mentioned, in terms of making sure that there's some giving going on, that is absolutely critical. One of the first questions funders, particularly corporate funders and sponsors, are going to ask you is, "does 100 percent of your board give?" And really, when you think about it, it makes sense. Because if these folks say I believe in the mission of this organization, I believe in the direction of this organization, I want to be a part of it. But they don't believe it enough to invest even a couple of dollars in your organization, then that speaks volumes to the funders.

So again, emphasizing that to board members is absolutely critical in terms of getting them engaged. But also, again, going back to the one-on-one engagement, and letting them know what you're doing. Things such as inviting them to open houses, and making sure they meet staff. And while I do think it's important to meet staff, again, as a director of a center, I've never been crazy about staff going directly to boards. I usually say don't do that, but I definitely think it's important that board members meet the staff, they see the program, and you invite them to an open house. You make sure that they have up-to-date materials about your organization, whether it's an annual report, a brochure, or information about your Web site. Basically, in any opportunity where your board wants to tell the world how wonderful you are, you want to make sure that you've equipped them with the proper information so that they can go forth and do that.

The other parts that I want to mention are just a couple of steps that also come in handy in terms of what I look at as 'board giving' and 'board getting'. And, a lot of times, when we think about the board, you know, being engaged with the board, and increasing activity, we tend to think in terms of money, and that's fine. And, I do think that boards should give financially. But also, particularly if you've got new members, or board members who aren't able to give, just a couple of things that you may want to engage them in as well. And a lot of times, this will open the door for them to begin to give large amounts. It may be something simple such as providing input for a fundraising plan, or providing a list of names for potential members.

Setting up meetings with foundations, corporations, or donors. Incorporating – you know, accompanying the director on business with donors and foundations. Writing individual thank-you notes, and that goes a long way. Whether it's a donor, or a corporation or a foundation, getting a handwritten note from a board member saying thank-you speaks volumes of the organization and of your board. And, a lot of times, when we do ask for things from funders we don't tend to say thank-you. And getting a thank-you note from a fundraiser goes a long way. Sending out personal solicitations to friends. Selling, you know, tickets if you do that. Helping assist with fundraising letters, drafting proposals, organizing or hosting parties, or other events. Obtaining prizes for raffles or auctions. Donating items. Helping with mailings. Holding a workshop on a special topic of their expertise, and donating the proceeds. Asking friends to donate to the organization instead of giving them birthday gifts. I mean, the list goes on and on.

And, a lot of times those small steps are ways to get your board engaged, because when you think about it, if someone came to you and said, "hey, could you help bring in \$1,000 next week," a lot of times we wouldn't know where to start. But having some practical steps where they can start, engaging them into the overall plan of your organization, and making sure they're equipped with the information about your organization, would take you leaps and bounds in terms of maintaining your board, maintaining a great relationship with them, getting them involved. Have them do what they do best. And also, helping them increase the activities at your center. And again, what I really want to do is stop for a minute and take questions, because I didn't want to have this turn into a lecture. And, so basically, I didn't know if there were any questions at this time.

Michele Higgs: Let's find out. Amy, do we have anyone online right now?

Operator: And, once again, if you do have a question, it is star, one. And we'll hear from Cynthia Harris.

Michele Higgs: Hi, Cynthia.

Cynthia Harris: Hello. I work at a Neighborhood Networks center in a small rural community in Florida.

And they asked me to start a board, but I don't know who to ask to put on the board. How do you go about finding out who should be on your board?

Stephen Broyles: Well a good way to start is looking at some of the things that your organization may need. As a rule of thumb, in terms of the boards that I developed, we always said, you know, we want to have a legal presence on the board. We wanted someone that has a fiscal background or is an accountant. It's a good idea to have someone who's had some experience with the media. And then, again, I like to have, what I always call my workhorses on the board. Folks who I know will just roll up their sleeves, that will come volunteer and will help out. And it never hurts, it never hurts to sign up just anyone that comes aboard that already have money in their pockets.

But, I would basically say look at it functionally in terms of the mission of your organization and the programs that you offer. And find out, are there particular folks that have those key skills that you need. The other thing that I would strongly recommend is that in terms of the population that you serve, I believe it's absolutely imperative, that we involve members of the groups that we serve on our board. And, I think it goes a long way in terms of helping us develop good programs, good policies and good procedures. So those are just some ideas as a rule of thumb. But really, on a case-by-case basis, look at your organization at the work that you're going to do and then look at the skill set that will help you accomplish some of those goals. But, like I said, generally have a legal presence, a fiscal or banking presence, and a media presence, as well as community involvement is a good way to start.

Michele Higgs: Thank you.

Operator: Moving on, we'll hear from Mary Frances Byrd.

Mary Frances Byrd: This is Mary Frances in the Houston office. I work as the HUD coordinator helping the centers. You speak of center staff directing the board, the center has a director and a coordinator, however, is it expected that the center director or coordinator will also direct the board? Or, should the owner or managing agent hire another person as a staff member to work with the board? How involved should a site manager get? You know, people are stretched thin and that's generally my question.

Stephen Broyles: OK. I – there's not a rule of thumb per se. I would generally say it's a good idea for a center director to be engaged with the board and not much directing the board. Ideally. You know, it's basically their job to be a liaison to the board, to keep the board informed. And how often you meet, you know, is up to you as an organization.

Mary Frances Byrd: Coordinating with the board.

Stephen Broyles: Exactly.

Mary Frances Byrd: OK.

Stephen Broyles: You know, basically I'm not saying here's there agenda for the boards; you're going to do ABC and D. I'm going to expect to have it back and I'm going to follow-up with you, but basically you coordinate with the board. You know, having a strategic plan in terms of "here's what we're trying to accomplish as a center." And once they see that, and they buy into that, then, you know, it's a matter of saying, well here – you know, board members are saying well here's my role, here's what I can take on.

And then, as far as a director, it's just following up with them. Basically, when they meet, they basically act as a second set of eyes and ears for you. And actually board's job should make –

they're supposed to, in reality, make the job easier for the director as opposed to adding additional work for them.

Brandon Felton: It's been my – this is Brandon Felton, technical assistance coordinator. It's been my experience that some centers vary. You have some centers that do have a center director who basically runs the Neighborhood Networks center working in one accord with the property manager on site to communicate directly to the board.

Then, you have some instances where the offsite property management company is more in communication with the board. Then, in that instance, it's more a responsibility of the center director to reach out to that liaison and kind of open up a dialogue about engaging the board or how involved are they. Or, would they be interested in assisting because it varies. Sometimes they actually are kept in the dark. The purpose of a call like this is to give the tools to the center director to know that there is a board available that is most likely interested in assisting that Neighborhood Networks center. So then, begin to communicate with property management or whoever is more the owner agent in direct relationship with that board, to kind of facilitate the dialogue and try to welcome them into the activities of the actual center. You have some centers that do regular reporting not only to property management but to the board. But, are they really communicating – are they getting a response? And, are board members actually visiting that Neighborhood Networks center?

And that's pretty much what we want to think about for the centers, is your board being utilized appropriately? Are they involved? Do they know who you are and what you're doing there at the center?

Michele Higgs: Does that help, Mary Frances?

Mary Frances Byrd: Every day is a learning experience. Thank you.

Michele Higgs: All right, thanks for calling in.

Operator: Joseph Mayerhoff has our next question.

Joseph Mayerhoff: Good afternoon. My question is fairly closely related to the last one, working in a company which has, of course, a Neighborhood Networks center but is run by a management company and a property ownership management company on top of that, I'm wondering whether you think that anybody from the higher levels within the company should be members of the board at all. And if so, what do you think the ratio of insiders, so to speak, should be to the outsiders?

Brandon Felton: I would say that you want to involve everyone who has the best interest of the Neighborhood Networks center in mind. If the property management company is pro-Neighborhood Networks center, then I would say if they have to make some of the major decisions, that they should be somehow involved.

Typically, board members are involved in the greater community. And, I wouldn't be able to speak more on the ratio, because I think that all depends on the situation. You know, there are some delicate situations at some centers, where they may want to press the issue to have someone internally on the board. And then you have some that are more committed to broadening their reach. It depends on if that center can serve more than just its immediate residents. So it does vary. Steve, do you have an opinion on that?

Stephen Broyles: Well I think the big thing on that one was – again, it depends on how it's structured. In the case, I believe of some of the centers, where you have a national organization with an established board, and you're working with them as opposed to having a local board, it's really going to change the dynamics of what you're trying to do. And I could speak more so on a local

board, because I really think it is a case-by-case basis. If you're dealing with, you know, a larger board outside of the community that basically overseas a large organization.

As a rule of thumb for a local board, you generally don't want a lot of staff of an organization serving on that board, because in some cases it can be seen as a conflict of interest. There's not a set ratio. And it really depends on when you're dealing with funders more than anything else. And that's the time when it becomes a concern. Outside of that, it really depends on the specifics of your organization and what specific situation you're dealing with.

Michele Higgs: Thank you.

Brandon Felton: And Steve, I have one more question. Just to go back to the original question about developing a board, she's charged with starting a board, and she didn't know where to begin. You gave some good areas that she needed to focus on the type of people. But, what's a practical way to actually approach some people to invite them on the board? Where can she begin on a practical level at looking for what kind of people and where they are to serve on the board?

Stephen Broyles: Well, I would say the first step goes back again to what Dr. Stewart and myself have been saying is really understanding, you know, what do you think you need for your board? And start developing these descriptions on the front end. There's a lot of places, I think, again, that can provide some of these where, you know, here is some standard board description, here's an expectation of what I would need.

Then, outside of that, what I tended to do, is I looked in the community for folks who are either one of two things, folks I knew that I knew would value the mission of my particular organization. Or, folks who I may not have known as well, but I've seen that, you know, this is a particular issue. And a lot of times, I would go there and just have a one-on-one conversation. I would let

them know why I was interested in them being on the board. And then, you know, if they say well, hey, I would like to have more information, I made sure I showed them, you know, information brochures, annual reports, you know, whatever you have, any collateral materials about your organization that you can share with them. A lot of times I'll invite them to come and see what I did, or what the center did, or what my organization did. And give them a chance to really buy into it. And then, after that, it's just a matter of whether I would have an engagement form saying here's the expectations, here's how often we meet, here's what I need from the board. And for you in particular, it may be someone that looks like a person that has a local beat on housing issues in our community, I like to get you engaged on our board.

So again, while I hate to, you know, broad stroke it because it's not necessarily a cookie cutter method, a lot of it starts with finding people that you know, or people who are either, you know, already value what you do; informing them, engaging in them, and then making it clear, what you want, need, and expect.

Ronald Stewart: This is Dr. Stewart; I would like to add another fact to that if I could. Recently there was a homeless shelter in the city of Riverside, California, that came to me and they needed to start an advisory board. And, we went about looking at the community by doing a little bit of key interviewing. We went out and spoke with the elected officials in the town, the council people. And then, we went out to the funders in the community of the people who are grantors and said to both sets of people who in town are you aware of, you know, are concerned about homeless issues, or are concerned about shelter issues. And we took those lists that we gathered from those meetings, and sure enough, a core group of names rose to the top, kind of like cream on the milk.

And we went back out to those individuals, and they ended up being the core-starting group of people that we use to form the board. But, we use the expertise and the wisdom that came in

from the elected officials and the funders who have a broad understanding of the community and know a lot of different people to get us started and pointed in the right direction.

Michele Higgs: Excellent. And I think that's definitely a good way to start. I was drawing back on my own experiences of going to community meetings, and finding those people who are very passionate about the issues that my organization was involved with. And, ultimately approaching them with my arsenal of materials about the organization to let them know what we were doing, so this is very helpful.

Brandon Felton: Stephen, you attached, we do have – for the summary, we do have some descriptions for board members. And you did have that commitment letter as well, I believe, so Neighborhood Networks centers will receive that when we send out the conference call summary.

Michele Higgs: Thank you much. Amy, have we any other calls on the queue?

Operator: We have no other questions in the queue. However, to give everyone another chance, it is star, one. And we'll have a follow-up from Mary Frances Byrd.

Mary Frances Byrd: Well, I just wanted to know how you spell, Stephen I can't ...

Michele Higgs: B-R-O-Y-L-E-S.

Mary Frances Byrd: My goodness, I have it right. Thank you.

Michele Higgs: OK. Certainly.

Operator: And now, we'll hear from Donna Ellison.

Michele Higgs: Hi, Donna.

Donna Ellison: Yes. You're mentioning sending out the call summary, how does that come out, by mail or e-mail.

Michele Higgs: E-mail.

Donna Ellison: You've got my e-mail address, so it will come to me?

Brandon Felton: Yes, ma'am.

Donna Ellison: Thank you very much.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Operator: And we have no further questions.

Michele Higgs: Did you guys want to expand on any of the points that you had made? Because I know there was one thing that I was particularly interested in, when we were talking about, you know, having the job description for board members. We're talking about what we expect of them, what we want them to do with the organization. Are we talking about a one-page, two-page document? I mean, exactly, what would you suggest for folks to put together?

Ronald Stewart: This is Dr. Stewart. I'll take a stab at it, and then Stephen, I'm sure, can build on all of the holes I missed. But, I think that for me, it's to keep things simple. Most board members want to work in a simple format. And, if we overwhelm them with something that looks like a powerful job description that we give them of a top-level lawyer, we may scare them. I think if we stick to the key points about what they need to bring to the table as individuals. And then, what they

need to do as a board member, acting as a board members, that would usually give enough highlight to all of the things we need to be concerned about. And, Brandon I have a – actually a guide I adapted from a national organization that worked with board issues, but I also have things like roles, responsibilities of individuals and boards as trustees. If you'd like, I could you send you that to add up on the posting.

Michele Higgs: That will be fine. I'm just going to – Amy, are there any more questions before I do this?

Operator?

Operator: No, ma'am.

Michele Higgs: I just want to go through a few of the—I jotted down some notes. You guys had me writing furiously by the way, this was a lot of information that we want to look at where the board comes from. Determine that they know what they're doing and where they're supposed to be. It's important to create a time agenda. Again this is preparing for the meetings and doing courtesy calls, working with the board in advance, providing the agenda by mail, and then also providing it when they come to the meeting.

One thing that I thought was particularly great, and that's the board binder. And I'm assuming, Dr. Stewart, that you were speaking of a binder for each person that is available.

Ronald Stewart: I do. Very much so. And that way, you know, the onus is not on them to carry everything around with them, because people forget, you know, and I think we just set ourselves up for failure, if we expect too much. And so, you know, one set at home, one set at the office.

Michele Higgs: OK. Excellent. The other thing, just something that I've been seeing as we've been talking today, is that we're basically getting to know the board members as people. It's getting down to the basics of providing them with all of the information they need about the organization,

learning who they are and what their interests are and by knowing that it helps you to prepare the organization for bringing these people on board.

So, it's like two sides here, you have what the organization does, and you want to make a match with what your board people do, so you need to be aware of what their interests are and to see that they match with what the organization is all about. Am I correct with that?

Ronald Stewart: I believe so. And I think that, you know, there's even one more step on top of that, and I would think probably Stephen supports this as well. But, it also just boils down to having a sense of humor at times. When board meetings become all business and dry and sometimes there are some very heavy issues that come before them, if you can bring a sense of humor to the board table, it sometimes just helps keep people focused. You know, and the more they get to know each other, the more they know what the organization is, and the more they feel ownership, I think it helps to just keep everybody centered in a more lively and productive meeting.

Stephen Broyles: I absolutely agree. Because, I think the thing to keep in mind is, that for the most part, board members really want to be there and they really want to help. So I think, you know, keeping that environment loose, you know, in a way where they can do what they want to do and what you want them do just—you just can't underscore it enough.

Brandon Felton: Let me ask you, in a practical sense, what are some of the examples of activities that board members do. When they help out an organization or a Neighborhood Networks center, what are some of the things that you all can list that they are not only responsible for, but what would they do on behalf of an organization?

Ronald Stewart: Stephen, do you want me to take a stab or do you want me to go first?

Stephen Broyles: Well, I guess it really is just a matter of what you're looking for them to do. You know, in a lot of instances, you know, what I generally hear folks say in terms of a board is: I need help with fundraising, or fund development, and that seems to be the key. And again, you know, things such as that, such as setting up meetings, you know, accompanying directors on meetings, writing thank-you notes.

In terms of the other piece, if they have a particular expertise, such as, if there's a lawyer on your board, you know, they may be made to look over a document, you know, in terms of finance, an accountant or a banker. Again, I would say: look at their particular expertise and can they – you know, that expertise, you know, can you bring it immediately to the table for your organization and offset some costs. Outside of that, they become your biggest cheerleader and one of your biggest marketing pieces that you can find. So, I think giving them some meaningful, tangible steps like that that they can do, you know, a lot of times will open the door for them to become more engaged.

As they do more, they become more comfortable with doing more, and a lot of times they'll come and ask you, what else can I do?

Operator: And, pardon the interruption, we do have a question from Brian Franke.

Michele Higgs: Thank you.

Female: Hi, this is a quick question. Is there a simple way to keep track of expenses that are reimbursed by board members for major activities? Is there some way to keep that kind of costing, financial record clear?

Ronald Stewart: Well, I would – well if I hear you correctly, I'm thinking about things where you are reimbursing board members. Maybe they're attending a conference with you, travel, you know, something that – an allowable expense that we're allowed to reimburse our board members for.

If you are doing that, probably a check is being cut by your accounting staff somewhere based on some kind of an invoice submitted by the board member. And although I will never sell myself off as an accountant, or a CPA, by any way, shape, or form, it would seem like that should be a pretty sufficient paper trail if you have an invoice supported by payment records to show how the disbursement was made.

Michele Higgs: Great. Thank you. I have a question. Is there ever an appropriate time to rotate someone off the board, say, in between terms? Say, for instance, you've got two-year terms for everyone, and someone is just not attending meetings or whatever. Should that already have been addressed in the job description so that they know after missing six board meetings, they're going to be rotated off the board? Or, how is that approached?

Ronald Stewart: I feel strongly, this is Ron Stewart again, that they should be. And again, I guess that's territory of pretty uncomfortable water for both staff and other board members. But it's like any other situation where if we don't set strong boundaries, we really don't have a lot to fall back on in future opportunities.

So, if we have a job description that calls for attendance at six meetings, and somebody starts to blow that, and not being able to be there, I would hope that we're talking to them after the first missed meeting saying, you know, what happened? You know, I mean there could be very legitimate reasons. Or, they may be saying, you know, this isn't working. I would try to get them to resign before I would ask them to leave. I think it's always better if we could have dialogue and get somebody to make a decision on their own. But, if in the end, they didn't, and they were

violating, you know, what we have in our bylaws and in our job descriptions, then it may require board action.

Michele Higgs: Great, thank-you much. Thank-you much. Amy, have we any other questions online?

Operator: We have no further questions at this time.

Michele Higgs: OK. Well, we have a few minutes left but if we have no more questions, I'm going to go head and close out. I'd like to thank Stephen Broyles and Ronald Stewart for being with us this afternoon. I'm sure you would agree that we've got a lot of good information to work with this afternoon. I know I learned a lot.

And I'm just going to go ahead and remind you that our next monthly conference call will take place on Tuesday, June 20th, on the topic of "Guess Who's Coming to Your Center, Event Planning at your Neighborhood Networks Center." You might note this is just in time since Neighborhood Networks Week is coming up July 31st through August 5th.

I'd also like to remind you of the resources that are available to you through the Neighborhood Networks Initiative. Aside from the Neighborhood Networks information center line, which is (888) 312-2743 you'll find numerous resources and information on the Neighborhood Networks Web site at [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org). And also, a reminder that the RTAW [Regional Technical Assistance Workshop] in Boston, Massachusetts, is coming up June 21st through 23rd. And, the deadline for making hotel reservations has been extended to June 5th. Again, the hotel reservation deadline has been extended to Monday, June 5th. And, the registration deadline for the RTAW itself is June 9th. And, you can visit the home page on the Neighborhood Networks Web site for registration information.

And of course, we're looking forward to Neighborhood Networks Week, which is July 31st through August 5th. And, if you need any help planning, you can visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site to download a planning guide from the Web site there. And, if you want to register your event, you can also do it at the Neighborhood Networks Web site, which is [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org).

Once again, we thank our speakers for sharing with us today and I thank-you so much for joining us for this conversation. Once again, thank-you and take good care.

Ronald Stewart: Bye everybody.

Operator: That does conclude today's conference. We do thank-you for your participation.

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